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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRASILIA 000532

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BRAZILIAN HUMAN RIGHTS SECRETARIAT SPEAKS ABOUT
DOROTHY STANG MURDER

REF: A. A. BRASILIA 00369

[1](#)B. B. BRASILIA 00437

[1](#)C. C. BRASILIA 00464

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER BISOLA OJIKUTU. REASON: 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On February 23, Poloff met with Perly Cipriano, Under Secretary for Human Rights Promotion at the Brazilian Secretariat for Human Rights, to discuss the Dorothy Stang murder case (reftels A, B, and C). During the meeting, Poloff and Cipriano discussed Stang's refusal to accept police protection, the involvement of the logging industry in Stang's murder, violence in the region, and "federalizing" Stang's murder case. Poloff also discussed Stang's murder with the Ministry of Foreign Relations' Human Rights Division. End summary.

Police protection

[1](#)2. (C) Refs reported the murder of Dorothy Mae Stang, a US citizen and Catholic nun, who was shot to death by three hired gunmen on February 12 near Anapu, Para. Stang lived in Brazil for thirty years and was a well known agrarian reform activist. One week before her murder, Stang, Cipriano, and others from the Secretariat for Human Rights met to discuss the ongoing conflict and Stang's security. Cipriano spoke with Poloff at length about this meeting and how those who participated expressed their "deep concern" for Stang's safety. Since Stang had received a number of death threats, the meeting's participants offered police protection or entry into the Brazilian witness protection program. Stang refused both offers because she strongly believed that her age, profession, and faith would protect her, according to Cipriano.

The Logging Industry

[1](#)3. (C) Cipriano stated that elements within the logging industry were responsible for Stang's murder and refused to believe that other sectors could have been involved. Since "few could afford to pay R\$50,000 (approximately USD 20,000) to each hired gunman," Cipriano and the GOB believed that Stang's murder was financed by a group of farm owners and loggers rather than one. (Note: There is no confirmation of Cipriano's interpretation that the R\$ 50,000 was offered to each gunman rather than a lump sum. End note.) This was based upon police and press reports in Anapu that provided him information about a "group of financiers." He thought that those responsible would be "captured in a few days." (Note: Press reports published days after our meeting supported this view. The police chief in charge of the Federal Police investigation stated publicly that a number of loggers and land title falsifiers may have worked together to commit the crime. Federal Police are now investigating names included in documents and letters sent by Stang to the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) and to state and federal authorities. End note.)

Local Violence

[1](#)4. (C) Immediately after Stang's murder, senior GOB officials spoke strongly against her murder and President Lula ordered the Justice Minister to send federal police to assist in the investigation. The violence in the days after her murder killed at least three, including a local leader of the landless community, and led to the deployment of Army troops to support state police. According to Cipriano, this violence was due to the "criminal element's" reaction to the GOB's "tough" stance against the murder. In addition, he thought the violence was an attempt to force the GOB against taking action which, he quickly responded, "we would never accept." (Note: Our sources told us that the violence and killings that occurred days after Stang's murder are endemic to the region and do not appear to be directly related to Stang's death. End note.) While he was quick to blame local criminals for Stang's murder and local violence, Cipriano also blamed poor Para state government regulation and the weak state judicial system.

Federalization

[1](#)5. (C) When asked about the status of federalizing Stang's case, Cipriano stated that this decision rests with the Brazilian Supreme Court. Since the law that allows case federalization is two months old, the GOB "will tread

carefully" on this issue since the outcome will influence other cases and set future precedence. Cipriano strongly believed that the Supreme Court would federalize the case due to widespread international interest and evidence of local corruption that would hinder local judicial proceedings. (Note: On February 24, Justice Minister Bastos publicly stated that he saw little need to federalize the case, as the state judge involved in the case has the GOB's confidence. End Note).

Ministry of External Relations' Human Rights Division

16. (C) In a separate meeting on February 22, Cristiano Figueiroa from the Ministry of External Relations' (MRE) Human Rights Division (DDH) also spoke to Poloff about the Stang murder case. Figueiroa called the murder "a tragic and barbaric act" and "hoped that the GOB's actions and the judicial process would lead to an adequate and just solution." According to Figueiroa, federalizing the case would lead to a more transparent judicial process and could ensure that the accused would be "brought to justice." At the end of our meeting, Cristiano stated: "Ironically, one week before Stang's death, the Human Rights Secretariat launched a campaign in Para to promote the same issues that Stang was fighting for."

17. (C) Comment: Now that the investigation into Stang's murder has slowed and both federal and state police have closed the investigation, it appears that the key question before the GOB is whether or not the case should be federalized. Cipriano, Figueiroa, and other contacts that we have spoken to have little faith in state police officials and the local judicial process due to evidence of corruption and involvement of influential farmers and politicians in the judicial process. We agree with our contacts and believe that the case should be federalized to ensure a transparent and fair trial, but Justice Minister Bastos' comments (paragraph 5) may foreshadow a GOB decision to let the case run its course in Para's judicial system. Given the GOB's aggressive investigation of the killing and sensitivity to political perceptions of its handling of this high-profile crime, we are perplexed about the thinking behind Bastos' position and will make additional queries on that point. End Comment.

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